

# NOT FIXED, NOT FORGOTTEN:

## A Theology of Pastoral Care for a Wounded World



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## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

### *The Cross and the Limits of Care*

They said the woman was near the end. She had stopped eating. Her pain was beyond managing. I walked in, a student then, trying to find the right tone, the right words. The breeze moved a curtain as I sat next to her bed. I said something I had learned to say, something gentle and professional. She smiled.

"You don't know what to say, do you?"

She wasn't accusing me. She was setting me free. Free from pretending. Free from performing. And then she asked, simply, for prayer.

It wasn't a moment for eloquence. It wasn't a moment for theology textbooks or therapeutic insight. It was a moment for the Gospel. Not as idea. But as promise. I prayed, not because I had the words, but because I didn't. I pointed us both to Jesus, because there was nowhere else to point. The room grew quiet. And the Word stayed.

We live in an age that wants expertise. That wants results. And too often, pastoral care has followed suit. The pastor becomes a counselor, a clinician, a technician. We are trained in strategies, taught about outcomes, handed charts and assessments. These may help. But they are not the core. They are not the Cross.

As a young pastor, I met with a young man paralyzed by anxiety. He wanted peace. I offered him techniques: breathing, focus, grounding. He tried them. They helped, a little. But as he left, I realized the Bible on my desk had stayed closed. I had given him what any therapist might. But not what only a pastor can. Therapy can help you float. But the ship will sink. It can help you rearrange the furniture, but the foundation will eventually crumble. It can help you survive the storm, but it will not raise the dead. Only the Gospel does that. Only the crucified Christ bears the full weight of our despair, our sin, our unfixable wounds—and walks out of the tomb.

The Gospel is not something we interpret or uncover. It is rather something given—an unconditional promise spoken from outside ourselves. The Gospel is not a reflection of human

wisdom or tradition; it is God's own Word, delivered through the crucified and risen Christ, declaring sinners righteous by sheer grace. Grace is not located in cultural expressions or emotional resonance—it is found only where Christ is preached as promise, “for you.”

When proclamation is replaced by discernment, and experience becomes the lens for locating God, we risk turning from the cross toward a theology of glory—seeking God in beauty, heritage, feeling or meaning rather than in the offense and foolishness of the cross. The Gospel does not arise from within us or our histories or competencies; it breaks in from beyond, killing the old and raising the new.

Pastoral care is not about skill. It's about calling. Not the pastor's voice, but God's. Not fixing people, but proclaiming Christ. Not answers, but a Word that speaks forgiveness into rooms with no oxygen left. And the strange, beautiful thing? That Word is enough.

People don't need the pastor to be clever. They need the pastor to be honest. To be present. To say the Word. To open the font. To break the bread. To speak forgiveness. To hold their hand when there is nothing left to say and everything left to believe.

The pastoral care that flows from the theology of the cross never promises that we can fix suffering. It never says the pain is good. It never makes meaning out of someone's trauma. It says: Jesus is here. And He is not leaving. He knows what to do with suffering and death.

These words were not written from a safe distance. They were shaped in hospital rooms and funeral homes, in late-night phone calls and quiet pews, in the slow, sacred work of walking with people through suffering I could not fix. They were formed not only in the lives of others, but in the dark corners of my faith when the only thing left to hold was the promise of God. This is not theory—it is testimony. What I have preached, I have also clung to. What I offer here, I first received in the ash and the ache.

This book is not a manual. It is a confession. Of weakness. Of need. Of grace. Of Christ alone.

And that is enough.

Pastor Mark Anderson

## INTRODUCTION

**"The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit"**

(Psalm 34:18).

**"My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness."**

(2 Corinthians 12:9)

Theologians write about pastoral care, and textbooks lay out theological frameworks, but there are moments in ministry that defy preparation—moments where the weights of human sin and suffering silence every clever word and polished response. Moments when all our pretensions to glory collapse into dust. It is in one such moment that this book's reflections begin—not with a theory or a strategy, but with a trembling voice, and the raw reality of pastoral care lived out in real time.

I still remember the phone call. It was one of our confirmation students, her voice frantic and broken. She had left the church minutes before and arrived home to find her father hanging in the garage. He had taken his own life.

Not six months out of seminary, I had rehearsed many scenarios for ministry in my mind—but not this one. No textbook or lecture, not even my internship, had prepared me for the raw silence of a traumatized, grieving young daughter or the hollow stare of a wife clutching a crumpled photograph in grief and anger. I was suddenly in deep water, and my feet couldn't find the bottom.

The night before the funeral service, I sat in my study, staring at a blank page. Every attempt at drafting a sermon felt hollow, insufficient. It was then, in the stillness of that night, that I realized I wasn't just preparing a sermon for them—I was confronting my own fears, doubts, and brokenness. No measure of preparation can fortify a person against such moments. The pastor does not wade into sorrow like this with answers; one simply *enters*, trembling, vulnerable, armed only with the promises of God.

Over the ensuing decades, that week of death, pain, and loss remained a foundational lesson. Every pastoral encounter over the many years that followed, in ministry with five congregations and as an Air National Guard chaplain, carried a trace of that first funeral.

It was the first of many pastoral lessons where I would be taught that vulnerability and brokenness aren't obstacles to ministry—but the very place where Christ meets us, and where we, in turn, meet others.

The Cross isn't just the doorway into pastoral ministry; it's the very substance of it. This is a necessary and bracing word, and many pastors—if we're honest—do struggle to face it. There's a deep temptation to treat the Cross as merely the threshold of ministry: something we passed through long ago when we were called and credentialed. After that, we too easily reach for competence, for control, for polished theology or therapeutic presence—something that lets us manage the suffering we're supposed to walk with.

But this move toward competence can be a subtle flight from the Cross. We forget that the Cross is not a past event we preach about from a distance; it is the ongoing shape of our lives and our care. And that's terrifying. Because it means we're not the rescuers. We're not the ones who hold it all together. We're not the voice of certainty or the dispenser of answers. We're the ones who stand in the dark—raw, unsure, aching—and say, not with confidence but with faith: "He is here. Even now."

This is not failure. This is ministry.

To embrace this—to live and care as those who have nothing but Christ—is to finally be unmade enough to be useful. It's the death of pastoral performance and the beginning of pastoral presence. Not an expert voice booming from above, but a cracked whisper from within: *"Come, let us go to him."*

And this isn't just a word for the seasoned and the worn-down. Ministry students, too, must face this squarely—perhaps especially so. When we are young, everything is still before us, and we tend to believe something great is possible: a successful ministry, a vibrant congregation, a church that flourishes under our guidance. That vision isn't wrong—but it often operates within the logic of the Law: achievement, impact, visible fruit. The Cross dismantles that logic. It teaches us that being a pastor isn't about ascending to spiritual effectiveness—it's about being brought low, again and again, so that the grace of God might be everything. To minister under the Cross is to watch your self-made dreams dissolve, and still bear witness to a hope that doesn't come from you.

## CHAPTER 1: THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

### ***The God Whose Nature Is Nearness***

God does not sit behind a desk. He does not hide behind curtains. He does not hand down care like a service rendered. From Eden's breath to Golgotha's sky, God has always come close. Always stooped low.

Not once does the Bible say God stayed put and waited for us to ascend. Instead, we hear: He walked in the garden ... He passed before Moses ... The Word became flesh and dwelt among us ... He descended into hell. This is the shape of God's care. Not detached benevolence. But movement. Nearness. Presence.

Theology is not a set of correct thoughts about God. It's the good news that God has come near to us in Christ. That nearness is not earned. It's given. And it changes everything about what we mean when we say "pastoral care."

God is not first a judge, a king, or a master artisan. God is first a shepherd (John 10), a mother hen (Luke 13), a healer with dusty feet and tired hands. We are not dealing with ideas. We are dealing with a living person who carries lambs, feeds failures, and touches lepers with no hand sanitizer in sight.

### ***Grace: He Gives Without Precondition***

Grace is not a doctrine to explain. It is a declaration to hear. And once you hear it—really hear it—it undoes you.

Grace says, "You don't have to get better before you belong." It says, "You don't have to find your way to God; God has already found His way to you."

But the soul doesn't always start there. Before grace can raise the dead, the Law names us as such. That ache in the conscience? That weight in the chest? That sense that something is broken and cannot be fixed? That's the Law doing its work. It doesn't wound to destroy, but to clear the space for grace. It topples the ladders we build so the Shepherd can come walking through the rubble and call us by name.

Theology rooted in grace changes pastoral care because it removes the ladder. There is no step-by-step toward healing. There is only a Shepherd who walks into the thorns and finds you. And when He lifts you, He doesn't ask for a signed confession. He carries you home, singing.

And baptism? Baptism is grace in, under, and with the water. It is not your decision for God—it is God's decision for you. A promise soaked in mercy. A drowning of every performance-based identity and a raising up of a name that can never be revoked: Beloved. When the pastor pours the water, it is not a symbol of your sincerity, your decision. It is God's Word saying forever, "You are mine."

### ***Pastoral Encounter: The One Who Came for the Bread but Found a Table***

He came to the church pantry on Thursday mornings. Always early. Always quiet. I offered a prayer once, and he waved it off. "I don't do religion," he said.

Still, he kept coming.

One morning I was placing cans in his bag and said, "You're always welcome here. Not for the food. For you."

He stopped. Looked at me. "You mean even if I don't believe anything?"

I smiled.

He nodded. Took the bag. And the next week, he came back again. This time, he lingered.

That's grace. It starts with food. But it ends with belonging.

### ***Redemption: He Does the Work***

Redemption is not your effort to get yourself or anyone else out of the pit. It's God's act of climbing in and hauling you out. Not metaphorically. Not symbolically. But literally—in flesh, with blood.

God does not wait at the top with a rope. He descends. Pastoral care that forgets this becomes technique, performance. But care shaped by the cross knows: we do not fix people. We do not heal sin. We do not manufacture hope. We simply bear witness to the One who has already done the work.

There's nothing wrong with therapy. It can help untangle the knots, clarify patterns, offer language where trauma once silenced speech. I've referred people to good therapists. I've thanked God for

them. But therapy cannot forgive sins. It cannot raise the dead. It can support the soul—but only the Gospel can resurrect it. The pastor’s calling is not to replace the clinician, but to bring a Word no one else can bring: “You are forgiven. You are His. Still.”

Baptism echoes this redemption not as a reminder but as a participation. “Do you not know,” Paul writes, “that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?” (Romans 6). We are not invited to admire the cross. We are pulled into it—and out the other side. Baptism is not a nice beginning. It’s a burial. And then a resurrection.

### ***Pastoral Encounter: The Man Who Thought It Was Too Late***

He hadn’t been to church in forty years. Sat on the edge of his hospice bed and said, “It’s too late for me. I’ve wasted my life.”

I didn’t give him a theology lecture. I just read Romans 5: “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

He closed his eyes and whispered, “Still?”

“Yes,” I said. “Still. You are baptized. God keep His promises.”

That’s redemption. Not a project. A promise. Already done. Already yours.

That Word had never stopped speaking. Even now, with medical machines humming, it whispered: You were buried with Him. You will rise with Him.

### ***Incarnation: He Comes in Skin***

If theology stays in the clouds, it dies in the valley. But incarnation means God comes not just to us, but as us. Flesh and bone. Tear and sweat. Dirt under fingernails. God does not float above pain. He bleeds in it. He does not shout from heaven. He whispers in wombs and dies with thieves. And that means pastoral care is not about escaping the human condition. It’s about meeting God in it.

The incarnation is not over. It continues in bread, wine, water, word, and neighbor. In baptism, God does not wait for you to ascend to holiness. He descends into ordinary water and says, “This is now my place. And so it is yours.” Baptism is not magic. It’s more scandalous than that. It is God saying, “I will not wait until you are ready. I will be your God now.”



## ***Pastoral Encounter: The Nurse Who Was the Gospel***

She didn't quote Scripture. She didn't give answers. She just sat with the dying. Wiped foreheads. Held hands. Listened.

A family member once said to me, "She doesn't preach, but somehow you know Jesus is in the room."

That's the incarnation. Not a concept. A presence. Christ in skin. Through the hands of the broken who stay.

Through the Word that drips from fonts and echoes in hospital rooms: "You are baptized. You are not alone."

## ***Conclusion: Baptism Is the Cross That Holds You***

People who are running scared always want a ladder. A system. A technique. But God gives us a cross. And through that cross, He gives us a name. A body. A promise. A baptism.

Theology, for all its complexity, boils down to this: God justifies the ungodly. He finds us in death and gives us life. He speaks into the void and says, "You are mine." That's not a plan for improvement. It's a Word that creates what it declares.

Pastoral care shaped by this theology does not come with answers. It comes with Christ. And Christ does not stand at the top of a staircase. He kneels at the bottom, washes feet, and refuses to leave. He steps into the water with you—and never steps out.

So when people ask what theology has to do with pastoral care, tell them this:

It has everything to do with it—because grace is not an idea. It is a person, the Living God.

And He still walks.

Still touches.

Still breaks the bread.

Still speaks the name.

Still stays—

Bringing forgiveness, faith, and freedom.

And in baptism, He puts it all in your hands.

## CHAPTER ONE REFLECTION QUESTIONS

### 1. Has grace ever come too close for comfort?

We often prefer God at a distance—an idea to manage, a symbol to admire. But grace comes uninvited, and undoing.

When have you been confronted not with a thought about God, but with a nearness that made you tremble—because it knew you and would not go away?

Did you try to escape it by being good, or by being busy?

### 2. When did the Law expose you—and did grace follow?

The Law doesn't simply accuse. It names the death already within. And it's only there, in the ruins, that grace speaks.

Has there been a moment when your strategies for wholeness collapsed—and you realized you couldn't heal yourself?

What did grace sound like when you had nothing left?

### 3. Are you tempted to offer people ladders, or the cross?

People long for control. They will ask you for systems, techniques, steps. But pastoral care rooted in grace cannot promise progress—it can only name death and resurrection.

Where have you tried to manage people's pain instead of proclaiming the Word into it?

What stops you from giving the one thing only you can give: Christ?

### 4. Where are you ashamed of flesh—and do you hide from incarnation?

Face the suffering, take up responsibility, don't hide in abstraction. God has already descended into it.

Where in your life or ministry have you avoided the messiness of real presence—of being there, in the wound, without escape?

What would it take to believe that Christ really is present in bread, water, dirt, and skin?

**5. Has the Word ever re-named you when you thought it was too late?**

Redemption isn't a goal. It's a verdict. While we were still sinners...

When have you heard the Word—late, undeserved, unprovoked—that called you “Beloved” when all you felt was wasted?

Did you believe it? Or did you try to argue with it?

**6. Do you trust that baptism holds—even when everything else falls apart?**

Baptism is not your sincerity. It's not your decision. It's the cross in water that declares: *You are mine.*

When fear rises, when the past returns, when your performance fails—do you cling to the name given to you in baptism?

Or do you look for a new identity to earn?

## CHAPTER 2: OLD TESTAMENT ECHOES

### ***The God Who Walks with the Broken***

The God of Abraham and Sarah, the God who called Moses from the bush, the God who bent low to whisper poetry into David's soul—that God has never changed. The same one who came walking in Eden's cool evening, who thundered from Sinai, who wept over Jerusalem, is the one who stumbled up a hill with a cross on his back.

We are not handed a different God in the Old Testament. We are handed the same God in different clothes—sometimes cloaked in fire and cloud, sometimes veiled in silence, sometimes wrestling in the dust—but always the God who shows up in the middle of life, not outside it. He does not wait for clarity, strength, or faithfulness. He creates it by showing up.

And that means pastoral care isn't a New Testament invention. It's as old as the tent of Abraham, as patient as Moses, as heartbroken as David's psalms, as fierce and tender as Isaiah's poetry. What we call pastoral care is really just this: *God with us*. In failure, in fear, in forgetting.

The Old Testament is not a museum of morals. It's a field guide for the lost. It teaches us what grace actually looks like—stammering, stumbling, and stubborn, yet pursued by a God who won't let go. It reminds us that God does not choose the qualified. He elects the unqualified—and binds Himself to them, not because they are righteous, but because He is merciful.

### ***Abraham: Called into the Unknown***

Abraham was not a hero. He was just the first to find out what it feels like when God breaks in with a word that undoes everything.

“Go,” God said. No road map. No safety net. No deal to sign. Just promise. “Go to the land I will show you.” Not a land with coordinates. Just *I will*. That's how God works: not with instructions, but with *election*—a disruptive, creative word that calls a future into being where there was none.

And Abraham went. And failed. And doubted. Sarah laughed. And still, God stayed. That's the scandal and the hope of grace. God chooses, and God keeps choosing—even after laughter, denial, and disobedience.

### ***Pastoral Encounter: The Man Who Left Everything***

He was restless. He had everything he thought he wanted—career, house, savings, security—but he came to me one day like a man holding a burning scroll he couldn't read. "I think I'm supposed to leave it all and go serve somewhere that matters. A refugee camp maybe. I don't know why. But it won't let me go."

He didn't need advice. He needed someone to name the Spirit moving in him. So I said what I believe: "God doesn't hand you certainty. He hands you himself. If you're looking for clarity, you'll be waiting forever. But if you're looking for the God who walks—even into the unknown—he's already there."

And so the man went. And when I heard from him, there was a sadness in his voice—but also peace. "I lost a lot," he told me once. "But I found something better. I found a God who doesn't wait on the other side of the risk. He walks through it with you."

That's Abraham's story. Not heroic faith. But open hands. Not control. But trust in the One whose promise creates the very path it commands.

### ***Moses: Shepherd in the Wilderness***

Moses was a reluctant leader. When God called, he argued. When God insisted, he stalled. But the miracle isn't Moses' courage. It's God's *persistence*. God doesn't uncall him. He just keeps showing up. And God does not call Moses because of his capacity—but because of his need.

So Moses leads—a people who complain, resist, and want to go back. Again and again, they say, "Why did you bring us here?" And again and again, Moses stands in the breach. Not because he has the answers. But because he believes in the God who is present even in dry places.

And more than that—Moses prays. He intercedes for a people who have forgotten how. He reminds God of His promises, not because God forgets, but because that's what pastoral care does—it

carries people in prayer when they can't carry themselves. Pastoral care does not only walk beside—it stands *before*, with arms lifted, pleading on behalf of those too tired, too stubborn, to plead for themselves.

### ***Pastoral Encounter: The Church That Wouldn't Move***

A pastor friend of mine served a church like many others—beautiful windows, good people, and a frozen spirit. “We want young families,” they say. But every suggestion toward openness met resistance. One woman actually said, “We’re fine just how we are. Why do we need to change what’s always worked?”

So he tried. A new Bible study. A song that wasn’t in the hymnal. But the people pushed back like roots gripping old soil.

“I feel like Moses,” he told me once. “Trying to lead people who don’t want to be led. They’re tired of the desert, but they don’t want to leave Egypt.”

That’s pastoral care. You walk with people, even when they don’t want to walk. You pray for them when they curse the manna. And you keep showing up because God keeps showing up.

That’s what Moses teaches us. Pastoral care isn’t efficient. It’s faithful.

### ***David: The Heart That Was Broken***

David wasn’t always bold. Sometimes he was broken. The man who danced before the ark also had a man murdered after sleeping with his wife. The king who wrote Psalm 23 knew what it meant to be hunted, to feel alone, to bear the weight of guilt, to fear the silence of God.

And still, he sang. “The Lord is my shepherd...” Not because he always felt it. But because he *needed* it to be true.

The Psalms are more than praise. They are laments, borrowed breath for those who cannot speak. In pastoral care, we often lend people the voice they’ve lost. And David’s voice—cracked with guilt

and sorrow, trembling with hope—is often enough to hold a soul together when it wants to fall apart.

### ***Pastoral Encounter: The Woman Who Wanted to Believe***

She sat across from me, clutching a tissue, her life unraveling. Her job gone. Her marriage bruised. Her faith worn thin. She opened her Bible to Psalm 23 and whispered, “I want to believe this. I really do.”

I told her the truth: “David didn’t write this on a mountaintop. He wrote it in the valley. When he said, ‘I fear no evil,’ he wasn’t being brave. He was trying to believe that even the valley wasn’t God-forsaken.”

She asked, “So I don’t need to be strong to trust God?”

And I said, “No. He meets you in the valley, not once you’ve climbed out.”

That’s what David knew. Not how to avoid pain, but how to trust a God who walks through it.

### **Prophets and Priests: Voices and Hands**

The prophets weren’t motivational speakers. They were burdened messengers. They told the truth when no one wanted to hear it. The prophets did not wield truth like a weapon—they bore it like a wound. But always tucked into the thunder was a whisper: *Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.* That’s not strategy. That’s mercy.

They named falsehood. But they also announced hope. In exile, they spoke of return. In judgment, they spoke of healing. Prophets are not primarily future-tellers—they are truth-tellers with tears in their throats.

### ***Pastoral Encounter: The Man Facing Cancer***

He was in his twenties. Newly married. Just beginning. And then the call came: cancer. He sat in my office after church, jaw clenched, voice low. “I don’t know what to do,” he said. “I don’t want to die.”

And I didn't give him false promises. I couldn't. I had stood in the same shadows, with questions I couldn't answer and fear I couldn't pray away. So I didn't try to explain it or fix it. I just told him what I knew to be true—because I had clung to it myself:

“You're not alone. God does not leave the broken behind. The same God who whispered comfort to exiles will whisper it to you, too.”

He didn't need a theology lecture. He needed presence. And the gospel—the Word of God—has always been just that: not explanation, but incarnation. Not answers, but a God who stays.

The priests stood in holy space, not to be distant from the people, but to hold them before God. They did not mediate grace. They *announced it*. Through blood and incense and sacrifice, they said again and again: *You are not forgotten. You are forgiven.*

### ***Pastoral Encounter: The Man at Communion***

He came forward with slumped shoulders, years of guilt written in the lines on his face. As I placed the bread in his hand, I said the ancient words: “The body of Christ, given for you.”

And in that moment, he wept. Not out of sadness, but release.

Because that's what the gospel does. It names what we try to hide. And then it forgives.

The pastor didn't fix anything. He didn't explain everything. He just stood there with a word. And that was enough.

### **Conclusion: The God Who Stays**

The Old Testament is not a ledger of saints.

It is a record of people who got in the way of grace—and were found by it anyway.

Sarah laughed at the promise.

Moses argued with the call.

David broke the commandments.

The prophets cried out, and the priests spilled blood on behalf of people who couldn't stop sinning.



And still—  
God stayed.  
Still spoke.  
Still forgave.  
Still walked with them, pillar by pillar, word by word, wound by wound.

This is not a story of heroes.  
It is a story of *election*—of a God who chooses the wrong people, the weak ones, the fearful and frail,  
and says: “*You are mine. Now go. I’ll go with you.*”

Pastoral care does not begin in competence.  
It begins in *call*.  
And the call always finds us stammering like Moses, weeping like Jeremiah, hiding like Jonah, aching  
like Hannah.

God does not wait for readiness.  
He speaks—and in speaking, He creates what is not there:  
faith in the barren, courage in the terrified, mercy in the violent, and hope in the forgotten.

You want to know what pastoral care looks like?

It looks like God walking into the storm with no umbrella.  
It looks like a shepherd stumbling after one sheep when ninety-nine are safe.  
It looks like a Word that breaks and heals in the same breath.  
It looks like a God who wrestles, not from anger, but love.  
And refuses to let go.

This is not a different God than Jesus.  
This *is* Jesus—before the manger, before the cross—already chasing after the broken with the voice  
that says,  
“I am here. And I’m not leaving.” Pastoral care is not our job to master. It is the echo of a God who  
keeps showing up. Even now. Especially now. Still.

## CHAPTER TWO REFLECTION QUESTIONS

### 1. Has the Word ever broken into your life—not to affirm, but to undo?

God's call is not self-affirmation. It is interruption. Abraham didn't find meaning in himself—he found it by obeying a voice that shattered what he thought was secure.

Have you encountered a Word that exposed your foundation—and in the wreckage, called something new into being?

What needed to fall apart for something more truthful to emerge?

### 2. Have you mistaken your failure as a disqualification—when it might be where God chose to begin?

We are trained to hide failure. But the theology of the cross and the psychology of the soul agree: transformation begins when illusions die.

Have you considered that your collapse wasn't an obstacle to grace—but the only honest ground it could inhabit?

What part of you had to fail so that something truer could be built?

### 3. When has the wilderness revealed your need to control God's timing—or protect your illusion of certainty?

Moses didn't choose the desert. And we don't either. But the desert strips us of the fantasy that we're in charge.

Have you stood in the place where your plans expired—and found that control was your final idol?

What illusions did the wilderness expose in you?

### 4. When those you serve can no longer believe, do you reach for advice—or stand with a Word that doesn't depend on them?

The Gospel isn't an offer, it's a *declaration*. In crisis, advice is cheap; presence is costly.

Can you resist the urge to fix—and instead take responsibility to *stand*, to bear their silence, and to speak the one Word that remains when all others fail?

**5. Have you ever stood in the gap between God's promises and your own despair—and waited?**

There's no darker place than where meaning collapses but the promise remains.

Have you dared to stay in that gap—not distracting yourself with busyness or theology, but naming the suffering without flinching? What did waiting do to you?

**6. Has God ever spoken into your barrenness, your fear, your disobedience—and done what you considered to be unthinkable?**

Grace does not wait for readiness. The call creates what it commands. But that creation often feels like death first.

Have you seen something rise from the rubble of your most desperate moment—not because you mastered it, but because God broke through? What do you now carry that was forged in fear?

## CHAPTER 3: JESUS: THE GOOD SHEPHERD

### ***Jesus as Pastoral Action, Not Model***

He never built a temple. Never held an office. Never wrote a book. But He carried the lost, touched the untouchable, and fed the hungry without asking for proof of worth.

He called Himself a shepherd—not a strategist, not a warrior, not a guru. A shepherd: the kind who knows every sheep by name, the kind who walks into thickets for the one that wandered off.

Jesus never once waited for the sick to get better before He healed them. He never demanded that the hungry deserve the bread. He didn't ask the bleeding woman to explain her theology of atonement. He simply gave Himself—without condition, without pause.

And in that, He gives us the shape of pastoral care.

Not from above. But from *beside*. Not by command. But by *companionship*. Not through power. But through *presence*.

Jesus' entire life was pastoral care in motion. Not as an example to copy, but as a promise: *This is what God is like*.

### ***He Seeks the One Who's Lost: Grace Without Metrics***

Jesus tells the story of the shepherd who leaves the ninety-nine to find the one (Luke 15:4–7). Not because it's practical. Not because it's efficient. But because that's who He is.

The math doesn't make sense. But grace never does.

The one sheep isn't just "lost"—it's *sought for*. And when found, it's not scolded or shamed. It's lifted. Carried. Brought home with joy.

### ***Pastoral Encounter: The Teen Who Ran***

She stopped coming to youth group. Stopped answering calls. Word spread that she had started

hanging out with a tough crowd. When I finally saw her again, it was outside a 7-Eleven. Hoodie up. Eyes low.

I walked over and just said, “Hey. We missed you.”

She shrugged. “Figured you were done with me.”

I shook my head. “Never.”

She just nodded. But the next week, she came back. Sat in the back row. Said nothing. But she was *there*.

That’s what Jesus teaches. Pastoral care doesn’t wait for the lost to return. It walks toward them. It doesn’t demand explanation. It rejoices when the door opens—even a crack.

### ***The Good Samaritan: Need, Not Worthiness***

When Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25–37), He wasn’t just answering a legal question. He was redefining the entire conversation about God.

The wounded man didn’t pick his rescuer. He was unconscious in a ditch. That’s the only thing Jesus requires of us: *need*.

The priest and Levite passed by with clean hands. But it was the Samaritan—despised, heretical, outsider—who became the image of compassion. Not with words. With oil, bandages, money, and time.

### ***Pastoral Encounter: The Caregiver Without a Title***

A man in my father’s congregation lost his wife to dementia. In those last months, when she no longer recognized him, he still sat beside her bed, whispering the old hymns they used to sing.

My father paid him a pastoral visit. “She doesn’t even know me,” he said. “But I know her.”

That's the Good Samaritan. Just someone *faithful*. Pastoral care isn't always dramatic. Sometimes it's just showing up when no one sees. Being there. Staying beside.

### ***He Heals Without Asking for Credentials: Law Abolished by Mercy***

Jesus healed lepers, opened blind eyes, raised the dead—and never asked what synagogue they attended. He never paused to assess moral fitness. He simply saw suffering and stepped into it.

In Mark's Gospel, a man with a withered hand stands in the synagogue. Jesus calls him forward (Mark 3:1–6). The Sabbath law says healing should wait. But Jesus says mercy cannot. Knowing the cost, He chooses to heal anyway in defiance of the law's silence.

And notice—Jesus often heals in public. Not for spectacle, but for *restoration*. His healing brings people back into the community that had pushed them out. He does not just cure bodies; He *repairs belonging*. This is a pastoral care that goes beyond private sympathy—it is public repair. It says, “You are not just healed; you are *welcome again*.”

### ***Pastoral Encounter: The Woman Who Hid Her Pain***

She sat quietly in worship for months. Rarely spoke. Until one day, after the benediction, she lingered.

“Do you have a minute?”

We sat in the sanctuary. Her story came slow—abuse, betrayal, estrangement. She was broken, defeated. “I sit here, but I don't know how to get close to God.”

I took a deep breath. “He already has you.”

She looked at me, startled.

“Jesus doesn't wait for wholeness. He speaks *into* our wounds.”

And the tears came—not because she believed it right away, but because something in her wanted to.

That's healing. Not fixing. Not resolution. But *presence that refuses to leave*.

### ***He Feeds Without Charging Admission: The Theology of Enough***

Five thousand people. No plan. No budget. No reservations. And still, Jesus says, "Give them something to eat." (Mark 6:30–44)

The disciples panic. "We can't afford it." Jesus doesn't argue. He just takes what little they have—five loaves, two fish—and breaks it. Blesses it. Multiplies it. Gives it away.

This is not a miracle of grandeur. It's a miracle of *enough*.

### ***Pastoral Encounter: The Potluck That Became a Lifeline***

It started with a few casseroles. A woman's husband had died. She was too tired to cook. People signed up to bring meals.

Then someone brought flowers. Someone else started mowing her lawn. A teenager came by to walk her dog. No one organized it. It just *happened*.

One Sunday she came to me and said, "I didn't know church could be like this."

That's what feeding looks like. Not always loaves and fish. Sometimes it's mac and cheese on a Tuesday. But it's always the same miracle: *Jesus takes what we offer and turns it into more than enough*.

### ***The Shape of the Shepherd***

Jesus does not ask His followers to become saviors. They are not called to replace the Shepherd—but to walk in the shape of His love, which always moves downward, always arrives with mercy. He asks them to *bear witness*—to walk as those who have been found, carried, healed, and fed. He does not hand us a checklist. He hands us *Himself*.

When He says, "I am the good shepherd" (John 10:11), He doesn't mean He's good at His job. He means *He lays down His life*. That's not technique. That's love.

Pastoral care does not mean you have the answers. It means you stay when the questions are too heavy to hold. It means you speak a Word that is not yours. And you trust that Jesus still feeds. Still finds. Still heals. Still stays.

### ***Conclusion: Grace in the Hands of the Shepherd***

Jesus doesn't offer a method. He offers Himself. And He doesn't wait for permission. He acts. When Jesus says 'I lay down my life,' He isn't using metaphor. He walks straight into the wolves, so the sheep might go free.

The sheep is lost..

The Shepherd goes. Finds. Lifts. Carries. Rejoices.

That's grace.

Not advice. Not potential.

*Action.*

The wounded man in the ditch doesn't get up.

Mercy kneels down.

Bandages. Pays. Returns.

All without being asked.

That's gospel.

Not something to do.

But something done.

Pastoral care isn't about helping people become better sheep.

It's about telling the truth: we've all wandered.

And Someone came looking.

You don't have to become Jesus for others.

You can't.

But He still shows up—

in your words,



your silence,  
your casseroles,  
your staying.

He is not an idea to imitate.  
He is a Shepherd who still feeds,  
still seeks,  
still heals,  
still stays.

And in His staying, we are saved.

## CHAPTER THREE REFLECTION QUESTIONS

### 1. When has Jesus acted before you were ready—before you even asked?

We imagine we find God by improving. But the Gospel says: *He came to find you when you were lost.*

Can you name a moment when Jesus met you—not because you believed, not because you deserved, but because He refused to wait?

What did it feel like to be found when you hadn't even called?

### 2. Have you mistaken grace for permission, or for passivity?

Grace is not softness. It is *sovereign mercy in motion*—unearned, unstoppable, undeterrable.

When has Jesus' grace confronted your belief that people must earn your care?

Where are you still tempted to protect your time, your energy, your compassion—until someone proves worthy?

### 3. Have you made belonging conditional—when Jesus never did?

The shepherd doesn't scold the lost sheep. He lifts it. Carries it. Rejoices.

Have you added requirements to grace—spoken or unspoken—that Jesus never mentioned?

What fears are you protecting by making mercy safe and sensible?

### 4. What ditch are you unwilling to kneel in?

The Good Samaritan doesn't float above. He kneels. Bleeds. Pays. And leaves no return address.

Where have you stepped back from someone's suffering because it was too messy, too slow, too costly?

What would it mean to show up—not with answers, but with bandages?

### 5. When have you wanted to fix someone instead of carrying them?

We are not messiahs, we're not Jesus.

Have you confused pastoral care with saving people?

Where do you need to let go of outcomes and simply stay?

**6. Have you believed that what you offer isn't enough—when Jesus never required more?**

Five loaves. Two fish. A casserole. A hymn. A hand. It was enough.

Where have you withheld small acts of care, thinking they weren't spiritual, sufficient, or “pastoral” enough?

What would change if you trusted that Jesus still feeds through what you give?

## CHAPTER 4: THE ROLE OF SCRIPTURE IN PASTORAL CARE

### ***The Word That Finds You***

The Bible is not a book of advice. It is not a catalog of answers. It is not a toolkit to fix someone's suffering or a rulebook to hand out during moral collapse.

The Bible is where God speaks.

Not spoke. *Speaks*. Still.

In pastoral care, we don't quote Scripture to explain things away. We don't use it to settle arguments or polish grief. We open it because it opens *us*. It tells the truth we are afraid to say. It names what we'd rather avoid. It wounds—and heals.

When people come undone, they don't need a verse like a band-aid over a wound. They need the kind of Word that goes down into the infection, into the bones and says, "*Live*."

### ***The Word Does What It Says***

God's Word is not primarily informative. It is performative. Not every verse is Gospel—but all of Scripture bends toward the cross. That is the center from which all true comfort flows.

When God speaks, reality happens. "Let there be light"—and there is. "Your sins are forgiven"—and they are. "Lazarus, come out"—and he does.

The same Word that created the world breaks into your hospital room, your office, your Thursday-night coffee conversation with a grieving parent. It comes with no fanfare, but with all the authority of heaven.

This is why we use Scripture in pastoral care—not to guide feelings or tidy up behavior, but to *speak life* into death. To proclaim the mercy of a God who *still speaks sinners righteous*. If someone has been wounded by Scripture used wrongly, don't rush to correct. Let the Word be re-heard through the voice of mercy. Reintroduce Jesus—not as rulegiver, but as rescuer.

## ***Scripture and the Broken***

The Psalms do not teach us how to grieve. They let us grieve. They wail. They accuse. They name enemies. And God includes them—not as theological distractions, but as permission slips for pain.

When someone is suffering, don't reach first for Romans 8:28. Open Psalm 13: *"How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever?"*

Let the Word enter the room like a fellow sufferer. Let it sit down. Let it bleed. The Bible does not rush past grief. It meets it. And so should we.

## ***Pastoral Encounter: The Woman Who Couldn't Forgive***

She told me she hated him. The betrayal was too deep. The pain too long.

"Everyone keeps saying I have to forgive," she said. "But I can't. I can't even want to."

I nodded. Then I read from Luke 23.

*"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."*

I didn't explain it. I just read it.

She looked at me and said, "He said that *while* they were killing Him?"

"Yes," I said.

She started crying. "Then maybe He can forgive *for* me."

And I whispered, "He already has."

That's what Scripture does. Not instruction. *Interruption*. A Word that cuts—and saves.

## ***Law and Gospel: Telling the Truth and Giving the Promise***

The Bible tells the truth in two ways. First, it tells the truth about us. That's law. We're not okay. We're not "getting better." We are dead in sin, and no amount of effort or insight can fix that.

But the Bible also tells the truth about God. That's gospel. God justifies the ungodly. God raises the dead. God forgives, not when we're ready, but because Jesus already died and rose and carries the whole mess into mercy.

In pastoral care, we don't have to hide from either truth. We speak the law—because suffering isn't solved by pretending. But we also speak the gospel—because only resurrection heals what death has taken.

Law is honest. Gospel is final.

### ***Pastoral Encounter: The Teen Who Thought He Ruined Everything***

He sat across from me, eyes red, voice shaking.

"I messed it all up. I lied to my parents. I got high. I cheated. I can't fix it."

I didn't try to soften it. I said, "Yeah. That's a lot of wreckage."

He nodded. Silent.

Then I opened 2 Corinthians 5. *"If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. The old has passed away. The new has come."*

He looked up slowly. "Even me?"

I said, "You were baptized, right?"

He nodded.

"Then it's already true. Before you even tried."

That's how Scripture works. It doesn't wait. It declares. It gives what it says.

### ***Where the Word Wounds and Heals***

The heart of pastoral care beats with the rhythm of Law and Gospel. The Law tells the truth about us—about our failure, our fear, our control, our need. It strips away illusions. It says, "You are not enough." And then the Gospel answers—not with advice, not with demand, but with a name. "You are mine," says Christ. "I have done it." The theology of the cross is not a lens we glance through—it is the world we now inhabit. It means that God is most present where things look most godforsaken. It means the dying is real—and so is the resurrection. It means the Word does not come to decorate our strength, but to dwell in our weakness, and to raise the dead.

### ***Scripture as Presence, Not Prescription***

You don't need a Bible verse for every crisis. You don't need to quote Scripture like a pharmacist dispensing medicine. You just need to let the Word be present.

Sometimes it means reading a Psalm and saying nothing. Sometimes it means letting a verse be the last thing said in a long silence. Sometimes it means leaving a note with a line of Isaiah scribbled on the bottom: *“Fear not, for I have redeemed you. I have called you by name. You are mine.”*

Pastoral care is not a performance of theological competence. It is bearing witness to a Word that *knows their name*. That *still speaks*. That *does not fail*.

### ***Guidelines for Using Scripture in Care***

Read slowly. Don’t rush. Let the words fall like rain, not bullets.

Don’t overtalk it. One verse can say more than twenty minutes of explaining.

Start with the Psalms. Especially when there are no words.

Use their baptism. Link the Word to the font. Remind them: this Word has *already claimed them*.

Let silence hold the Word. You don’t have to fill the room. Let it echo.

### ***Conclusion: The Word That Won’t Let Go***

You don’t need to make the Bible “relevant.” It already is. You don’t need to defend it. It’s a lion. Just open the cage.

In pastoral care, we are not Scripture’s editors. We are its hearers. Its carriers. Its witnesses. And when we speak it—not as technique but as trust—it does what God always intended it to do:

Find.

Break.

Heal.

Raise.

Name.

Hold.

Because in the end, the Bible is not about people finding God. It is about God finding people. And speaking them back to life.

## CHAPTER FOUR REFLECTION QUESTIONS

### **1. Has Scripture ever spoken *before* you were ready to hear it—and changed everything anyway?**

The Word creates what it declares. True speech disturbs the chaos.

When has a verse—unbidden, unwanted—cut through your defenses and exposed you?

Did you try to manage it? Or did it do what it came to do?

### **2. When have you used Scripture to explain instead of to *proclaim*?**

We are tempted to control the Word—to make it therapeutic, palatable, tidy. But the Bible is not a technique. It is the voice of God still speaking.

Have you ever softened Scripture out of fear it would offend or overwhelm?

What would it mean to trust that God knows how to speak even when it hurts?

### **3. Has the Law ever named your ruin—and did the Gospel follow fast enough?**

The Law tells the truth that kills. You must name this dragon precisely so it will consume you.

When have you heard, “You are not enough”—and known it was not accusation but honesty?

What Gospel followed it? Did you let it or resist it?

### **4. When did a Psalm say what you were too afraid to say yourself?**

The Psalms rage, weep, accuse, despair—and are not edited out.

Has Scripture ever given you permission to grieve, to rage, to not be okay—without fixing it?

Did you experience that not as rebellion, but as prayer?

### **5. Do you trust that Scripture can still carry someone when you cannot?**

There comes a point in pastoral care when no explanation suffices.

Have you ever had to let a single verse speak more than you could—because you were out of words, or because yours were too weak?

Did you believe that silence could be faithful?



**6. When have you heard the Word declare something about you—and you dared to believe it?**

The Gospel is not invitation but declaration. To believe the Word is to accept a truth larger than your trauma.

When the Word named you forgiven, beloved, raised—did you try to earn it, or did you let it happen to you?

What had to die in you to believe it?

## CHAPTER 5: THE HOLY SPIRIT AND PASTORAL CARE

### *The God Who Moves From Within*

Pastoral care is not powered by personality. Not driven by charisma. Not sustained by insight or technique. Any therapist, life coach, or self-help guru will do on that score. Pastoral care is breathed.

The Holy Spirit is not an accessory to ministry. The Spirit is its pulse. Its wind. Its birth and its breath.

When Jesus left, He did not leave instructions. He left the Spirit.

He didn't hand out a manual. Yes, long before the Bible. He gave a Comforter. And from that moment on, all Christian care has been Spirit-dependent. Not Spirit-assisted—Spirit-driven.

Because the Spirit is not a supplement to our strength. The Spirit is the presence of God dwelling in weakness, groaning in prayer, sighing when we no longer know what to say.

And that's good news for pastors, caregivers, and every trembling soul who shows up at a hospital bedside or the kitchen table. You are not alone. You are not the healer. You are not the wisdom-giver.

The Holy Spirit is already there, gently nudging you out of the way.

### *Spiritual Gifts Are Not Talents*

We confuse gifts of the Spirit with traits we can measure or manage.

But the gift of mercy is not just empathy. It is the Spirit whispering forgiveness into places we thought were only deserving of judgment.

The gift of discernment is not human savvy. It is the strange ability to see through the tangle of words and defenses and spot the ache that hasn't been named.

The gift of exhortation is not advice-giving. It is Spirit-shaped speech that calls someone toward the truth—not as guilt, but as freedom.

These are not learned behaviors. They are given graces. You don't earn them. You don't master them. You receive them, like wind in a sail you didn't know was raised.

And so, when you find yourself saying the right thing without planning it, or crying with someone when you didn't think you could feel anything at all, or sensing a silence that needs no word—you're not performing.

You're participating. You are walking where the Spirit has already gone.

### ***Pastoral Encounter: The Prayer That Was Just Breathing***

It was late when I arrived. The hallway lights in the hospice wing were dimmed, and the only sound was the soft wheeze of the air system cycling through another long night.

He hadn't prayed since the cancer came back.

"I used to have the words," he said. "I used to know how to talk to God."

"What changed?" I asked gently.

He didn't answer right away. Just looked down at his hands. One held the frayed edge of a paper cup. The other trembled slightly.

Finally, he said, "Now all I can do is breathe. That's it. Just breathe. I lie here at night and I try to say something, but nothing comes."

We sat in the silence.

Then I said, "Maybe that's the prayer."

He looked up, puzzled.

"Maybe the Spirit is praying in you," I said, "with sighs too deep for words. Maybe He's not waiting for you to say it right. Maybe He's already speaking."

That night, I didn't pray out loud. We just breathed together.

That's the Spirit's work. Not performance. Not persuasion. But presence. When the prayer is too far off to reach, the Spirit carries it home.

### ***Power Made Perfect in Weakness***

The Holy Spirit is not the force that makes strong pastors stronger. The Spirit is the presence that abides with the weak, the unsure, the ones who've run out of clever words.

Which means the most Spirit-filled moments in pastoral care often don't look powerful at all.

They look like:

- Sitting in silence while someone weeps
- Praying when you don't know how
- Holding a hand in hospice
- Admitting you don't have an answer
- Speaking a Word of promise anyway

The Spirit does not need polish. The Spirit needs space.

We don't summon the Spirit by emotion or effort. We trust that He is already at work—interceding, comforting, convicting, healing, groaning with sighs too deep for words.

### ***Practical Guidance: When You Don't Feel It***

There will be moments when you wonder if the Spirit is absent. You'll feel dry. Flat. Like your prayers land on the floor. But the Spirit is not a feeling. The Spirit is a fact.

God has poured out His Spirit on all flesh (Acts 2). That includes you. Even when you doubt it. Even when your voice shakes. Even when the visit goes badly.

So here are a few reminders for pastoral care that leans into the Spirit's work:

- Pray before you speak. Not eloquently. Just honestly. "Come, Holy Spirit."
- Watch for signs of presence—not power. A stillness. A tear. A long pause.

- Don't manufacture hope. You can't. Bear witness to it.
- Trust that the Spirit speaks even through broken words.
- End with a blessing, not a solution. The Spirit is not a therapist. He is the Comforter.

### ***Scripture Speaks the Spirit's Voice***

The Word and the Spirit are not rivals. They're partners. The Spirit never speaks apart from Christ—and never apart from the cross. He comforts not by escaping suffering, but by leading us into the wounded presence of the crucified One, where God is most fully given.

The Spirit does not float around detached from Christ. He delivers Christ. He brings the Word near. Not as a concept but as Comforter, Accuser, Justifier.

So when you open Scripture with someone, remember: it is not just an ancient text. It is the Spirit's own breath.

When you say, "Your sins are forgiven," it is the Spirit who makes it true.

When you read, "The Lord is near to the brokenhearted," it is the Spirit who brings nearness.

You don't need the right interpretation. You need the Word and the trust that it carries more than your voice.

It carries the presence of God Himself.

### ***Conclusion: Not By Might, Nor By Power***

Pastoral care will tempt you to lean on your strength. But the Spirit will quietly pull you back.

Not by might.

Not by power.

But by My Spirit, says the Lord (Zechariah 4:6).

You may not feel empowered. But you are not alone.

You may not know what to say. But the Spirit groans.

You may not see fruit. But the Spirit remains.

So go in weakness.

Speak in trust.

Stay in silence.

Pray without strategy.

Listen for the sigh.

And know this:

The Spirit is not a power you wield.

He is the presence who carries you and all the baptized.

## CHAPTER FIVE REFLECTION QUESTIONS

### 1. Have you mistaken the Spirit for your own strength?

The Spirit is not a supplement to the strong but the breath of God in the weak.

Have you ever looked back on a moment of deep inadequacy—when your words failed, your presence faltered—and realized it was the Spirit who carried the moment, not you?

Did that frighten you? Or free you?

### 2. When have you spoken less—and trusted more?

Truth is often born in silence. The Spirit speaks precisely where performance stops.

Have you ever resisted the urge to explain, fix, or impress—and found that the silence held more holiness than speech?

What did you learn about presence when you said nothing?

### 3. When did you discover that your *insufficiency* was the place the Spirit preferred to work?

We want to be helpful, powerful, competent. But the Spirit comes through cracked vessels, not polished ones.

Where did your need become the doorway for grace—not just for others, but for you?

How did that change your view of “ministry success”?

### 4. Have you confused emotional intensity with spiritual presence?

The Spirit is not a mood. Not a charge in the room. Not a feeling to be conjured.

When have you doubted the Spirit was there—only to realize He had been there all along, quietly groaning where no one else could reach?

What does it mean to trust the Spirit, not your perception of Him?

### 5. What gift have you received that clearly was not your own?

Grace is gift. You did not generate your best moments—they were given.

Has there been a time when you said the right word, stayed longer than you thought you could, or

wept when you didn't know why?

Could you admit that it wasn't you—but the Spirit moving before you were aware?

**6. When have you experienced the Spirit *as person*—near, groaning, present?**

The Spirit delivers Christ. The real is revealed in suffering.

In a moment of true pastoral presence—by a hospital bed, at a graveside, in a kitchen—when did you realize you were not alone?

Not sentimentally—but actually. What did the Spirit do that you could not?



## CHAPTER 6: PASTORAL CARE AND COMMUNITY

### ***The Table Is Not Set for One***

Jesus never ministered in isolation. From shared meals to long walks, from hillside crowds to hidden upper rooms, His care was always wrapped in relationship. He did not build a sanctuary of solitude. He built a table. And He filled it—with doubters and fishermen, tax collectors and sinners, weeping women and curious Pharisees. When He called disciples, He didn't just call them to Himself. He called them to each other.

The same voice that said, “Come to me,” also said, “Love one another.”

This is the rhythm of real pastoral care—it begins in Christ's welcome and continues in the welcome of His body. The church is not a service provider. It is the fellowship of the wounded. A people formed not by agreement, but by shared grace.

Community is not a backdrop for pastoral care. It is the soil in which it grows.

### ***The Early Church: One Heart, Many Hands***

In Acts 2, the Spirit does not fall on individuals in separate rooms. He comes like wind—and the people gather. They break bread. They share their goods. They devote themselves to teaching, to prayer, and to each other.

It's easy to romanticize this early community, to imagine an ideal church immune to division. But this was no utopia. It was messy. There were arguments, needs, failures. And yet—*grace kept holding*. Grace did what rules never could. It bound strangers together and made them family.

Pastoral care in this kind of community doesn't require a formal title. It looks like bread shared when the paycheck is late. Like prayers whispered in the kitchen. Like someone staying after worship to sit with the one who didn't speak a word.

The early church didn't wait for the right structure. They simply lived as those who had been found. And they found each other.

### ***Small Groups: More Than Programs***

A small group is not a strategy. It is a place to become known. And being known—really known—is the beginning of healing.

In living rooms and fellowship halls, the church becomes more than Sunday. It becomes human again. Where names are remembered. Where silence is allowed. Where someone can say, “I’m falling apart,” and hear, “You don’t have to fall alone.”

This is not about perfecting the format. Programming can stifle fellowship. It’s about creating space for presence. Because what heals people is not always answers. It is belonging. Small groups that do real pastoral care don’t rush to fix. They sit with. They listen. They carry burdens in the name of the One who still carries us all.

### ***Mutual Care: The Priesthood of All the Broken***

You do not need a stole to bear someone’s grief. You need ears. A heart cracked open by mercy. And the Spirit, who calls all believers to care.

Paul calls us members of one body (1 Corinthians 12). That means when one part suffers, all suffer. And when one rejoices, all share in the joy. Pastoral care is not the work of one. It is the work of all. Not divided by rank, but unified by need and promise.

Mutual care is not a burden—it is grace multiplied. It is mercy passed hand to hand. It is Christ’s love moving through ordinary people: a casserole, a phone call, a card, a walk, a ride to the doctor, a hand held in hospice. These are not side acts. They are the sacramental shape of a church that still believes in incarnation.

Pastoral care is not only what we do for others—it is what we awaken in them.

The church is not a shelter run by a few while the rest wait in line. It is a body, a fellowship of the baptized, where each member is both carried and called. Called to notice. Called to stay. Called to pass on the care they’ve received.

Jesus did not say to Peter, “Feed them all yourself.” He said, “*Feed my sheep.*” And then He made him part of a body where the Spirit gives many gifts—mercy, discernment, compassion, encouragement—so that *no one bears the burden alone.*

To offer pastoral care is to do more than comfort. It is to nurture a community where the comfort of Christ becomes contagious. Where someone brings bread, and another brings time, and another brings silence, and together they bring Christ.

You are not the whole church. But you are part of it. And your care—quiet, imperfect, faithful—teaches others what grace looks like with hands. And the use of the gifts are movements of mercy that the Spirit distributes as needed. You may not know when you are using them—but they are not yours to manage. They are Christ’s to give.

So speak the Word. Break the bread. Hold the sorrow. And then remind them:

You can do this too.

Because the Shepherd still walks among us.

And every sheep matters.

And the flock does not care for itself by accident.

Pastoral care does not just restore.

It multiplies.

### ***Pastoral Encounter: The Church That Became a Circle***

She had lost her husband. The service was over. The cards had come and gone. And grief, as it does, remained.

“I feel like I’m disappearing,” she told me. “No one knows what to say anymore. So they don’t say anything.”

But one day, her small group asked her to come. She resisted. But they showed up anyway. Not with speeches. Just presence. They brought soup. They told stories. One of them cried without apology. Another just held her hand.

A few weeks later, she said, “I didn’t realize how much I needed them—not to solve anything, but just to be there.”

That’s the church. Not a program. A people. Not a task. A circle. A grace that says, “You are not alone.”

### ***The Church Where the Promise Lives***

The church is not held together by shared progress. It is held together by a shared promise. That in Christ, the dead rise. The lost are found. The sinner is justified. And no one walks alone—not because they’re strong, but because He is faithful.

Community does not work because we all get along. It works because Christ is in the middle—always mediating grace, always speaking forgiveness, always joining the two or three in His name. The church is not a collection of qualified caregivers. It is a people who gather because they have been gathered—by Word, by Water, by Bread, by Spirit.

We do not invite people into our competence. We invite them into Christ. And Christ does not give advice. He gives Himself.

That is the church’s pastoral care:

A table that is never set for one.

A body where every wound is met by mercy.

A community where the cross is not explained, but carried—together.

A baptismal people, born not of their own strength but into a promise:

You are not alone. You are not your own. You are part of Christ—and Christ is not divided.

## CHAPTER SIX REFLECTION QUESTIONS

### **1. Have you ever tried to care alone—and come to the end of yourself?**

The body is not a metaphor. It's how Christ shows up—in others. Isolation may feel noble, even necessary, but over time it disfigures the soul.

What were you protecting when you decided to carry more than you were meant to?

When have you found relief, not in solving the burden, but in sharing it?

What if your weakness wasn't a flaw in the system—but part of its design?

### **2. Have you mistaken programs for people—and lost the face of Christ in the process?**

It's easier to control systems than to risk being known. But strategy will never replace incarnation.

When have you used structure to keep distance from messier forms of love?

What would it take to see your church not as an organization to manage, but as a table to set—where faces matter more than efficiency?

### **3. Has someone ever held you when you had nothing left to give—and what did that teach you about grace?**

We are not held together by strength, but by the honesty of shared frailty.

When did someone's quiet presence break through your collapse more deeply than any solution could?

What did that moment say about the way Christ shows up—in the hand held, the silence kept, the meal brought?

### **4. Are you more comfortable giving care than receiving it?**

Sometimes the refusal to receive care is a mask for control—or shame.

What fear are you protecting when you insist on being the one who helps, not the one who needs?

When did you resist being seen because being seen felt like failure?

What might it mean, in that moment, to believe you are justified—*not by usefulness, but by grace*?

**5. When have you seen grace multiply—without anyone planning it?**

One small act of mercy can ripple outward in a way no strategy could anticipate.

Have you ever watched kindness pass hand to hand until it became something larger than any one person?

What allowed it to spread—humility, proximity, someone letting themselves be known?

**6. Have you forgotten that you are not the whole church—and tried to become more than your part?**

Burnout often begins with the lie that it all depends on you. But the Church is not built on your ability.

Where have you tried to play Savior—out of fear, pride, or the subtle belief that others can't carry it?

What would happen if you believed the Spirit was already at work in the room—and your task was not to do everything, but to trust?

## ***Conclusion: The Word That Stays***

This little book has not offered you a method. It has not taught you techniques. It has not charted a linear course from brokenness to healing. That is by design. There are many books that do that—manuals on empathy, handbooks for trauma care, texts on conflict resolution or congregational psychology. These have their place. But this is not that place.

This book has not given you steps to follow. It has given you stories. And more than stories—it has given you a theology. Not theology as abstraction, but as presence. Not ideas about God, but the Word of God that comes down, that justifies the ungodly, that creates faith where there was none, that raises the dead and gives them names.

That's pastoral care. Not a method. A man. Jesus Christ, crucified and risen. Who still speaks. Who still touches. Who still walks into locked rooms and sits beside the broken. Who still baptizes. Still feeds. Still forgives and brings life out of death.

So no, this is not a manual. It is a witness. And if it has any worth, it is because Christ Himself does not stand apart from the wound. He enters it. Stays in it. Speaks within it. This is the Word that stays.

This book began not with theory, but with a phone call. A daughter. A garage. A man hanging where a father should have stood. And a pastor—new, unprepared, without strategy—who showed up. That's where pastoral care begins. Not with training. With presence. With weakness met by grace. With death met by a Word that refuses to stay silent.

You have read of Abraham wandering, Moses arguing, David weeping. Of Jesus healing without credentials, feeding without requisition forms, touching lepers without gloves. You've been reminded that Scripture is not magic—but promise. That the Holy Spirit does not float above—but indwells, groans, intercedes. That the Church is not a building but a baptized body, where no one suffers alone and every cross finds shoulders nearby.

You have heard what pastoral care is: not fixing, not advising, not solving, but staying. And in that staying, bearing witness—to the Christ who went lower still, to the Spirit who whispers even when you have no words, to the God who does not require your strength, but gives you His.

So to you, pastors, chaplains, ministry students, caregivers, friends: take heart. You do not bring God to people. He is already there. You do not hold the answers. But you bear the name. And that name has been sealed on you in baptism—not as a badge of competence, but as a promise: “I will be your God. And you will be mine.”

And yet, a sober realism is required. Much of pastoral ministry is lived not on the mountaintops of clarity, but in the valleys—among shadows, in rooms thick with absence, at bedsides where breath grows thin. These are the places where loss defines the landscape and illusions—about control, about progress, about fairness—are lovingly, painfully undone.

The pastor is not sent to smooth over the ache with technique, to dispense optimism like balm. You are not called to fix what God has not promised to repair on your timetable.

So go. Not with a manual, but with mercy.

Not with a clever answer, but with the Word that justifies.

Not to solve, but to stand.

And stand with this confidence: pastoral care is not your burden to bear alone. The Word you bring is not your own. It is the voice that said, ‘Let there be light.’ And still does. And that Word will not fail.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Pastor Mark Anderson was a Lutheran pastor with over 46 years of experience in parish ministry. He earned a double major in history and religion from Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, in 1973. He pursued theological studies at Luther Seminary in Saint Paul, Minnesota, and was ordained in 1977 at Trinity Lutheran Church in Madison, Wisconsin. Throughout his ministry, he has served congregations in Minnesota, Montana, and California. Additionally, he served as an Air National Guard chaplain, with assignments at Buckley Air Force Base in Colorado and March Air Force Base in California.

In his online ministry, "God's Word Is Life," Pastor Anderson provides a range of resources, including weekly Zoom Bible studies, articles, podcasts, and music, with the goal of making theological concepts accessible to a broad audience. He collaborates with organizations like the Luther House of Study in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, to further theological education. He is also the author of *Life in Christ: A Pastor's Perspective*.

Pastor Anderson and his wife, Linda, reside in Coto de Caza, California. They have three grown children—Erik, Geoff (married to Jenn), and Kristin.

For more information or to access his ministry resources, please visit his website at [pastormarkanderson.org](http://pastormarkanderson.org).